

Problem Re-representation in Israeli-Syrian Relations

A Senior Honors Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for graduation with distinction in
Political Science in the undergraduate colleges of The Ohio State University

By

Philip Pesek

The Ohio State University
June 2005

Project Advisor: Dr. Donald Sylvan, Department of Political Science

Introduction

Although tension and conflict between Israel and Syria are nothing new, the past decade has seen numerous important shifts in the details of their relationship. Billings and Hermann (1998) have argued that one of the possible factors underlying such shifts can be re-representation of the problem by one or both parties to a conflict. This project seeks to determine whether the events of this period have lead to one or both sides re-representing the fundamental problems which they face as described by Billings and Hermann. Further, this thesis examines whether likely instances of such re-representation correlate with measurable changes in cooperation between the two sides.

The models which International Relations scholars use to analyze problems of international conflict and cooperation can be classified into three general genres: game theory, psychological theory, and quantitative-empirical theory.¹ Goldstein and Freeman (1990) contend that while these approaches are different in essential ways, they fundamentally describe “the same conception of strategy” which features two components.² States form their strategy through both *reciprocity*: their reaction to the moves of another actor, and *cooperative initiatives*, which “get the ball rolling in the context of mutual reciprocity.”³ Since states form their strategy to address “problems,” the actors must first form a “problem representation” which “is generally recognized as the foundation of all decision making.”⁴ For this purpose, “actors” are the relevant decision making entities behind a state (ie. a dominant political party within a liberal democracy, an individual or small group in a totalitarian regime, etc.) While a *problem* can exist in an

¹ Joshua Goldstein and John R. Freeman, 1990, *Three-Way Street: Strategy Reciprocity in World Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press),6

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Robert Billings and Charles Hermann, “Problem Identification in Sequential Policy Decision Making: The Re-representation of Problems” in Sylvan, D.A. and J.F. Voss (eds.), 1999, *Problems in Foreign Policy Decision Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 54

objective sense that is “independent of cognition,” a *problem representation* describes an actor’s cognitive definition.⁵

Reciprocity can itself consist of various strategies. Perhaps the simplest is a basic “tit-for-tat” strategy as described by Axelrod (1984), which consists of an actor adopting whatever strategy they see the other side using. According to Axelrod, when “tit-for-tat” is repeated by an actor numerous times in the context of a problem which resembles a Prisoner’s Dilemma, it leads to the optimal outcome for a particular side.⁶ In the first iteration of the game, the actor chooses to cooperate. Thus when such a game is played numerous times, if the other side is choosing cooperation, or at least using a consistent “tit-for-tat” strategy, an optimal cooperative outcome results. If the other side does not cooperate, the actor begins to reciprocate with non-cooperation, thus still achieving the best outcome they can. However, states sometimes make moves which violate “tit-for-tat” principles. A state can decide the way to respond in reaction to many different influences. They may take a pessimistic view of the situation, and choose to not cooperate no-matter what the other side does. They may also respond to conflict with cooperation initiatives (giving an “olive-branch” to the other side). The actor’s problem representation may directly support either sort of response (ie. an actor can decide the problem is not a Prisoner’s Dilemma) or the decision can be somewhat incidental (ie. an external factor such as U.S. policy might weigh in). Either way, the actor’s problem representation forms the context underlying the decision to be made.

Since states exist and interact in the international order over extended periods of time, it is possible for problems and their representations to shift and develop over extended periods of time. Billings and Hermann describe a model for sequential decision making which addresses

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Robert Axelrod, 1984 *The Evolution of Cooperation*, (New York:Basic Books), 15

how the same one problem can be “re-represented” over time, taking into account the “legacy of the past” as well as the more traditional game-theoretic “shadow of the future concept”.⁷

In analyzing problem representation, Billings and Hermann begin by presenting a “General Scheme for Sequential Decision Making” in which an actor goes from identifying their goals to seeing the discrepancy between those goals and reality and problem diagnosis, to formulating a decision and implementing it in the first 6 steps.⁸ In the remaining steps, the actor examines feedback and reconsiders the initial decision.⁹ As this process is repeated, the actor is influenced continually by feedback in a sort of “loop”.

Of key interest in the Billings and Hermann framework is the evolution of this process over time. The choice made in each iteration of the feedback loop can be one of the following:

- A) Continue Present Course
- B) Change Basic Course but Make Adjustments
- C) Change Course, but not Problem Representation
- D) Re-Represent the Problem
- E) Reconsider Fundamental Goals¹⁰

Of these, the first three would appear to comprise the most common courses of action. While a decision maker can cycle through feedback loops constantly, monumental changes are relatively not as erratic since after an initial few iterations of decision making, the goals and problem of a decision maker are likely to stabilize.¹¹

Billings and Hermann describe and classify various feedback events to the extent that they affect problem representation. The “legacy of the past” is critical in determining how an

⁷ Ibid., 53

⁸ Billings and Hermann., 56-58

⁹ Ibid., 58-59

¹⁰ Ibid., 57

¹¹ Ibid., 76

actor reacts to feedback. The “level of certainty” and “commitment to prior actions” that a policy maker has each time through the loop directly affects the nature of the decision they make.¹² If an actor’s choices fail to achieve their goal, a “minority influence” may become part of the process, influencing the actors to alter their views.¹³ Whether the feedback is positive or negative can change these factors and cause the actor to continue or to change course respectively.

Absent the later two choices at the end of each decision making loop, the actor maintains their representation whether they change course or not. As is fairly intuitive to any observer of Middle East events, the same basic problems among actors in the region continue over long stretches of time. While feedback events, both small and large, occur frequently, the fundamental conflict between Arabs and Israelis, and more specific conflict between certain Arab states/groups has lasted for decades in many cases. Hence, it is entirely possible that the problem representations themselves stay the same, and actors simply alter their approach from time to time.

Billings and Hermann also suggest that either the fundamental goals and/or the problem itself can change as well. A change in resources, such as the aid available from a superpower could alter the priority of goals. For example, when Syria has the strong backing of the Soviet Union, it might choose to pursue an aggressive anti-Egypt/Israeli peace stance. With the loss of those resources, that goal may fall by the wayside.

As they interpret feedback received following a decision, the way that an actor attributes the causation of events is critical closely tied to the likelihood of a problem re-representation.¹⁴ Billings and Hermann, borrowing on the work of Heider (1958), categorize the attribution in

¹² Ibid., 67-68

¹³ Ibid., 64-66

¹⁴ Ibid., 70

terms of coming from either external or internal sources, and as being transitory or permanent.¹⁵ Problem re-representation is likely to occur when feedback suggests that either goals are unclear or the nature of a problem is not as it appeared, and this is attributed to an internal source (ie. the decision maker was unsure about their goals or had a “defective” interpretation of the problem).¹⁶ Conversely, external attributions often lead to changes in behavior without rethinking a problem, often with after-the-fact rationalization of why particular circumstances interfered with an otherwise appropriate choice.¹⁷ Internal attribution also does not ensure problem re-representation, since the failure of the actor’s strategy may be linked to the “choice of the wrong tactic or insufficient effort,” instead of problem representation, something which is especially possible when there is a viable opposing minority which threatens the decision making actor (ie. for victory in an upcoming election).¹⁸

The strategy-driving representation of a problem for a state can also change when external factors intervene, such as when there is a change in the leadership. However, in such a case a problem is not “re-represented” by the same group. Rather, the relevant actors are simply switched. In a regime where the party in power changes frequently (ie. Israel), it is important to consider the potential for alternate problem representations to coexist.

The states of Israel and Syria provide an excellent real-world case of actors which have faced essentially the same problem for an extended period. While most of their modern history has been characterized by a fundamental lack of cooperation, the 1990’s brought great, albeit abortive strides toward a potential peace.

This thesis seeks to evaluate the framework of Billings and Hermann using the Israeli-Syrian case to examine whether either actor likely re-represented their problem during this

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 71-73

¹⁷ Ibid., 73

¹⁸ Ibid., 74

critical period. Since a multitude of variables can cause changes in the affairs of the two states, this search for a true instance of problem re-representation occurs in two stages.

In the first stage, events during which a significant shift in the behavior of one or both states must be identified. Then empirical details surrounding the decisions are analyzed according to the guidelines of the Billings and Hermann framework to determine whether each case is consistent with the prescription for problem re-representation.

Finally in the second stage, the aftermath of any probable re-representation found in the first stage analysis is tested in order to determine whether its effects substantively altered the future behavioral patterns of the re-representing actor enough that they are inconsistent with the actors previous representation.

In stage I., by evaluating the case study of the Barak administration and its immediate aftermath, I attempt to reconcile empirical evidence of the psychological process of the actors with the criteria of the Billings and Hermann model. Under this scheme, problem re-representation is viewed as a dependent variable and sequences of events which trigger it are independent variables.

In stage II., representation of the problem is the independent variable and a patterns of conflict/cooperation over time are the dependent variable. The purpose of this stage is to try to compare what might otherwise criticized as an arbitrary label of re-representation with ‘real world’ indicators of the diplomatic disposition of the relevant actor. I examine three factors: the level of verbal cooperation, instances of “tit-for-tat” behavior, and instances of “olive-branch” behavior”.

Hypotheses

Building on Billings and Hermann's ideas, this thesis addresses the issue of whether there are instances of problem re-representation in Israeli-Syrian relations which lead to a change in the prevalent patterns of cooperation between the two states. Specifically:

Hypothesis A: If the Labor Party (as demonstrated by the regime of Ehud Barak), changed its problem representation in 1999, then it will be found to have an observable shift from uncooperative strategy or “tit-for-tat” strategy, to a high cooperation and “olive branch” strategy. The Barak government developed a consensus that it needed to do more than what seems to have been a mixture of military actions coupled with continued occupation of Lebanon (pessimistic, unilateral conflict). It took upon itself to make a significant cooperative gesture (high cooperation, “olive-branch”), the pullout from Lebanon, in hopes of changing the nature of its situation hoping to eventually at least a “tit-for-tat” response on the part of Syria.

Hypothesis B: If the Labor Party, following the withdrawal from Lebanon, changed its problem representation again to be pessimistic about cooperative initiatives, then it will be found to have lead to an observable shift from a high cooperation, “olive branch” strategy to “tit-for-tat” and unilateral uncooperative strategy. The new feedback following the re-representation described by Hypothesis A contradicted the expectations which the Barak administration held for their action. Thus, realizing an error on their part, they reverted to a pessimistic or at best “tit-for-tat” representation.

Hypothesis C: If Syria, following the unilateral withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon changed its problem representation, then it will be found to have shifted from a cooperative and “tit-for-tat” strategy to unilateral uncooperative strategy.

Prior to the Israeli pullout from Lebanon, Syria had reciprocated Israeli cooperation and the two sides had made significant progress towards a peace treaty. However, after Israel’s withdrawal, their representation shifted towards a view that cooperation was virtually futile.

Historical Context

The relations between Syria and Israel have been stormy since the latter’s inception. Since Hafiz al-Asad came to power in Syria in 1970, forming the basic regime framework, which exists under his son today, several consistent areas of conflict have formed the basis the relationship of the two states.

The territory of the Golan Heights, which Israel seized during the 1967 war, has consistently been an object of contention—so much so that it perhaps provided the critical mandate for the Asad regime’s legitimacy. The return of the Golan to Syrian hands has been widely seen as the key groundwork in any prospective Israel-Syrian peace treaty.¹⁹

A far more broad and complex issue however has dominated Israeli’s relations with Syria however. Israel’s general divide over the Palestinian issue with Arab states has long materialized itself in the Syrian case through the conduit of their mutual neighbor Lebanon. After “the Golan front” became in essence “frozen” after the 1973 war, Lebanon became the “battlefield” for Israel and Syria.²⁰

¹⁹ Helena Cobban, 1999, *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks: 1991-96 and Beyond*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press), 9

²⁰ Elizabeth Picard, 2002, *Lebanon: A Shattered Country* (New York and London: Holmes and Meier), 130

While modern Syria has often viewed Lebanon as an extension of “Greater Syria,” it had acknowledged and respected its sovereignty since the 1940’s and the two states had taken distinct paths until the mid-1970’s.²¹ Then, during a period of civil unrest which began in 1976 between Maronite Christians and Muslims for control of the country, Syria intervened by force and “had by 1977 established his virtual hegemony over most of Lebanon.”²² From that point onward Hafiz al-Asad imposed his “Two independent states, one people” rhetoric.²³

In the early 1970’s, Lebanon became a staging ground for the PLO after it was forced out of Jordan.²⁴ By 1974, Israel was conducting “preventative” operations within Lebanon.²⁵ After years of attacks from Lebanese territory, the IDF began Operation Peace for the Galilee in June 1982 creating a 25-mile buffer into Lebanese territory.²⁶ This major Syrian presence in Lebanon would remain until May 2000, setting the stage for Israeli-Syrian competition and conflict over the country.

Through the early 1990’s, the Israeli-Syrian relationship remained intensely hostile and in that sense stable. Even among Arab states, Asad’s Syria took a particularly hardliner stance toward Israel during this period, as exemplified by their reaction to the Israeli-Egyptian peace.²⁷ The chaos of the civil war in Lebanon during the 1980’s only served to further entrench the two sides in the deeply troubled country. However, by around 1990 the circumstances began to change, as the Taif accord ended the Lebanon war and the surrounding international order shifted. During the Cold War, “the Soviet Union had been the prime source of political, military, and economic aid and support for the Syrians, and moreover had provided strategic backing in

²¹ Ibid., 112,113

²²Eyal Zisser, 2001, *Asad’s Legacy: Syria In Transition*, (New York: University Press), 129;
Moshe Ma’oz, 1988, *Asad: The Sphinx of Damascus*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson), 133

²³ Picard, 113

²⁴ Ronen Sebag, “Lebanon: The Intafada’s False Premise,” *The Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2002, 13

²⁵ Picard, 86

²⁶ Sebag, 14

²⁷ Itamar Rabinovich, 1998, *The Brink of Peace: The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 15

the face of a possible Israeli or US attack on Syria.”²⁸ From its standpoint, Syria had long viewed the US with contempt because it believed that Israel “owed its existence and allegiance to the Western powers.”²⁹ However, after “the radical change in the world order removed the main pillar of Syria’s foreign policy strategy,” its participation in the international coalition during the Gulf War led to an “unexpected opportunity to work more closely with the US.”³⁰ Following the events of 1991, the tone was set and “Israel, Syria, and all of Israel’s other neighbors sat down together at a peace conference in Madrid, with the avowed aim of reaching final peace agreements among them.”³¹

As the US-backed negotiations proceeded, an external blow in came to Syria when the Palestinian Authority and Jordan signed peace agreements with Israel. Damascus took the view that this agreement weakened “their bargaining position and damaged the chances of a full restoration of the Golan Heights.”³² “For the moment it was proved to Israel that peaceful relations were attainable with most of the Arab world without a peace agreement with Syria, [and] it seems that Jerusalem’s as well as Washington’s motivation for advancing such an agreement at any cost decreased.”³³ At the same time, Syria maintained a long tradition of linking its relations to Palestinian issues.³⁴ By 1995 however, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin had agreed secretly, in negotiations mediated by the Clinton Administration, to withdrawal from the Golan.³⁵ Over the next year, negotiations proceeded, however, momentum slowed under Rabin’s successor, Shimon Peres who had not even been informed of the Golan “deposit”

²⁸Zisser, 45

²⁹Neil Quilliam, 1999, *Syria and the New World Order*, (Reading: Ithaca Press), 177

³⁰Ibid., 163

³¹Cobban, 4

³²Eval Zisser, 2001, *Asad’s Legacy: Syria In Transition*, (New York: University Press), 115

³³Ibid., 116

³⁴Ghanda Hashem Talhami, 2001, *Syria and the Palestinians: A Clash of Nationalisms*, (Florida: University Press of Florida), 208

³⁵Patrick Seale, “The Syria-Israel Negotiations: Who is Telling the Truth?”, *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2, Winter 2000, 74-75

prior to Rabin's death.³⁶ The talks made significant progress, but ultimately deteriorated with Peres' decision to launch Operation Grapes of Wrath in Lebanon, and his subsequent electoral loss to Benjamin Netanyahu.³⁷

When the Likud Party was in control from 1996-1999, there was little meaningful negotiation with Syria, however, Ehud Barak's 1999 election brought in a Labor party government that sought to re-ignite peace efforts.³⁸

Methodology

Stage I.

To detect a problem re-representation, the case study of a single type of actor (ie. Israel-Labor party, Syria) inserted into the decision making framework and analyzed multiple cycles of the loop Billings and Hermann describe. A basic sequence of indications should accompany any problem re-representation. First, the initial representation must lead to a strategy which fails. This is detectable so long as one can observe evidence a problem still exists (ie. violence/displays of tension in a conflict). Naturally, success will confirm a representation, ending the cycle and eventually the problem. Second, the evaluation of feedback must suggest to the actor that their strategy failed because of flaws in their goals or understanding of the problem. This is detectable either directly in public discourse or by observing the nature of subsequent decisions. Theoretically, they might never reach this conclusion, since external events may intercede continually, or the initial representation may indeed be correct while their approach is wrong. Finally, the actor will take a new action or follow a new strategy which is consistent with a different problem representation. In isolate representations from external

³⁶ Ibid., 75

³⁷ Ibid., 76

³⁸ Zisser, 121-124

events and leadership difference as much as possible, I have chosen to focus on a single administration—that of Ehud Barak—for Israel, and primarily through Hafiz-al Asad’s regime in Syria (though I suspect his son’s takeover is not nearly as much of a change as a new Israeli administration.)

To be detectable, the action must also be inconsistent with the initial representation. As such, an obvious issue for an outside observer is that a new action may also be consistent with the previous representation. Unless the actor explicitly indicates to the observer that their representation is changed, this is an inherent source of ‘false-negative’ error. However, this possibility is rendered mute by the fact that a strategy which is consistent with the initial representation will likely only result from a re-representation not distinct enough to be of any major interest.

In Appendix A and B I have mapped out paths that Israel and Syria have taken over time based on my case study, including instances I believe may represent problem re-representation based on what is available to me as an outside observer. I sought to find cases where there was no compelling possibility of an explanation other than problem re-representation. In addition to regime changes being excluded, I rejected events during which the United States or another third party played a pivotal role.

Stage II.

In order to scrutinize the instances of re-representation found in the case study, I treated these situations as a quasi-experiment using an interrupted time series of cooperation data, juxtaposed with the hypothetical re-representations. Hudson, Schrod, and Whitmer (2004) demonstrate how patterns can be observed in quantitative bilateral cooperation data and how

“their frequency corresponds to changes in the qualitative characteristics of the conflict.”³⁹

Where such changes occur in Stage I. cases, conflict/cooperation data is plotted using their web-based tool (available at ep.jhax.org). By default, this tool contains numerous data sets from the KEDS project. The Levant data sets available as of March 2005 are problematic, as the sources used to create them are not consistent.⁴⁰ Specifically, the older data is compiled from Reuters, and newer data is from Agence France Presse (AFP).

Due to this inconsistency, I have constructed my own data set based on the KEDS Levant data set using AFP for the entire period of interest. Since this project required only a subset of what had been done in the Levant data, articles were downloaded from Lexis-Nexis using the `nexispider.pl` program and the search string, “ISRAEL! OR PALESTIN! OR SYRIA! OR LEBAN! OR PLO”. Thus, all irrelevant actors except Palestine and Lebanon were excluded. Palestine and Lebanon were retained as a reference to ensure the resulting data made sense and to permit possible observation of Lebanon independently as side curiosity. The resulting files were then run through `nexisreverse.pl` with output then fed into the TABARI program using the same actor, verb, and option as the published Levant data set in the manner described in the KEDS/TABARI documentation.

Ray Whitmer kindly added the resulting data to the ep.jhax.org web tool. Outputs of conflict/cooperation patterns for actors SYR and ISR were generated for the time periods relevant to each hypothesis using the “text” button of the application. Due to the frequency of data available for Syria and Israel, a time interval of 21 days per unit was chosen. This allows for a reasonable number of events to occur in each data point, yet provides numerous data points for comparison and conjecture.

³⁹ Valerie M. Hudson, Phillip A. Schrodtt, and Ray D. Whitmer, “A New Kind of Social Science: The Path Beyond Current (IR) Methodologies May Lie Beneath Them” (ISA 2004, Montreal), 2

⁴⁰ Ibid., 24

There are two types of data used here to check for the effects of a problem representation. First, the raw number of material and verbal, conflict and cooperation events for each 21-day block provide a view of the type of actions a side is taking during a specific point in time. Since there was a relatively low frequency of material events, verbal actions are analyzed to prevent errors from lack of data.

Second, these are examined with respect to one another to determine whether an action was unilateral (done without the other side taking one first), “tit-for-tat” (a response to the other sides immediately preceding action, or an “olive branch” pattern where one side reacts with cooperation in response to conflict from the other side.⁴¹

While an isolated unilateral action is not necessarily meaningful, especially when the overall frequency of events is relatively low, a series of either “tit-for-tat” or “olive branch” activity over a significant period is a strong statement of one side’s approach to solving their problem, and hence their problem representation.

Instance Analysis:

Hypothesis A

Hypothesis A states that if the Labor Party (as demonstrated by the regime of Ehud Barak), changed its problem representation in 1999, then it will be found to have an observable shift from uncooperative strategy or “tit-for-tat” strategy, to a high cooperation and “olive branch” strategy.

As depicted in Appendix A, Labor’s initial problem representation viewed Lebanon as both a military asset and one to use as leverage in negotiations with Syria. For the purposes of

⁴¹ Hudson, Schrodtt, Whitmer, 33

this study, the initial problem representation leading to the presence in Lebanon is assumed to predate the period in question: the peace talks of the 1990's and their aftermath.

The initial representation is exemplified by a predominantly “tit-for-tat” strategy—that is to say that Israel would maintain their occupation, or withdraw it based on moves by Syria. The Labor had remained consistent that cooperative moves by Syria would be reciprocated, and in fact demanded Syria make initial steps (as incidently the Netanyahu government had between Labor administrations as well). There is evidence that under Rabin and Peres, Israel was on the brink of making concessions, but only based on Syrian reciprocal action or guarantees thereof. However, by the time of Ehud Barak's administration, or soon after, violence in Lebanon had shifted public opinion of the occupation to the extent which was necessary to decisively weight on the decision making of the Labor party actor to shift their representation.⁴² Movements denouncing the occupation such as “Four Mothers”—an anti-occupation group formed after a helicopter crash killed seventy-three IDF soldiers while ferrying them to Lebanon, gained greater momentum through increased media coverage.⁴³ Further, the content of news coverage changed to include more battlefield footage, and “beginning in 1997, Hezbollah began taping every ambush, roadside bomb, and mortar attack on IDF soldiers” which was then shown on Israeli television.⁴⁴ The internal effects of public opinion caused a rethinking of southern Lebanon's importance to Israeli security and led to a new representation of the problem.

The second column of Appendix A depicts this re-representation. Based on repetitive feedback received from years of occupation and various more minor changes in military posture, Israel determined that occupying Lebanon was actually fueling terrorism and hurting Israel's situation. Based on this internally attributed feedback, without any equivalent gesture on the side

⁴² Sebag, 16

⁴³ Ibid., 17

⁴⁴ Ibid.

of Syria, Israel made a unilateral decision that leaving Lebanon would reduce violence and lead to improved relations. The new representation was inherently a unilateral cooperative initiative, which did not await a move on Syria's part.

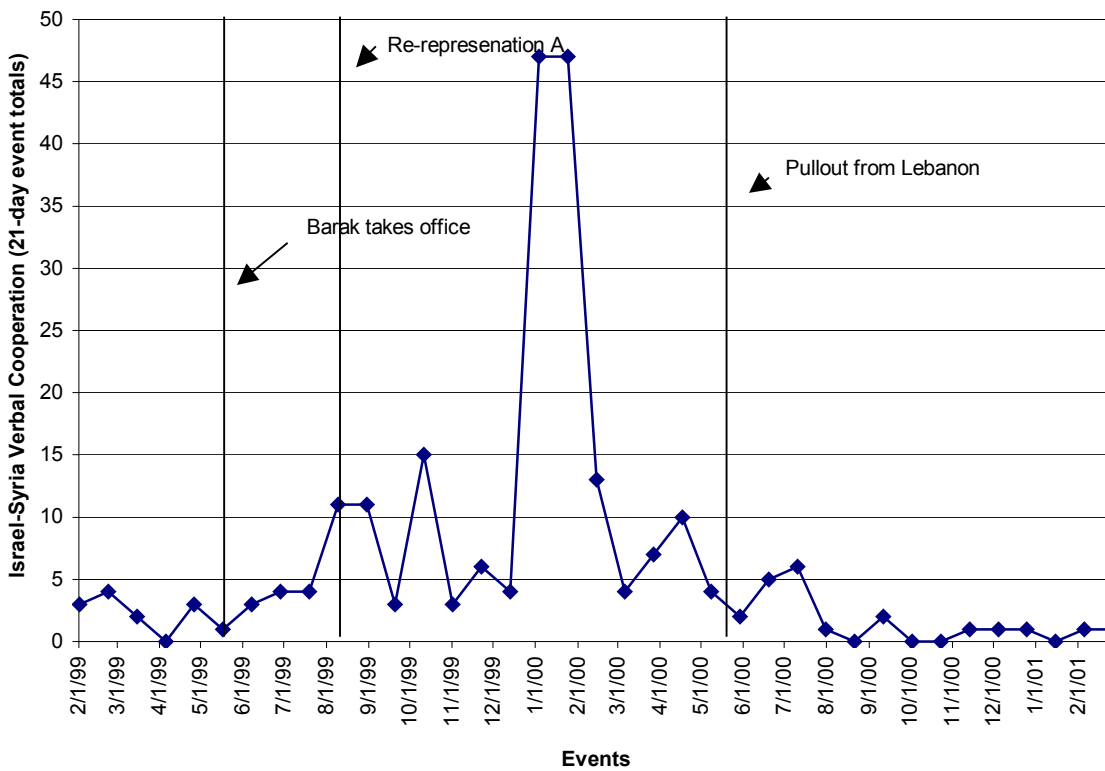
The Barak government gradually discussed a partial pullout, and finally settled on, and announced a full retreat late in 1999. Negotiations with Syria had stalled. Israel's implementation of the withdrawal plan also went forward despite numerous violent incidents associated with the Lebanon occupation. For the purposes of this analysis, this representation was in effect with certainty from fall 1999 until the May 24, 2000 pullout and before and after this period for some less certain length of time.

During, I would expect to see an increase in cooperation independent of Syria's actions, as well as likely instances of "olive branch" behavior, where Israel continues cooperative actions despite conflict from Syria.

Since there is no good source for data on Labor just prior to Barak actually being in office since the previous administration is considered a different actor, there is some possibility that the actual change in problem representation is not covered. However, I did not locate media coverage (in AFP articles used for data) until late July, 1999 of serious discussions for a pullout from Lebanon. Therefore, the block starting 8/9/99 was chosen as a starting point. Mentions of the pullout plan occur regularly from this point onward for the new problem representation.

When examining Israel's verbal cooperation events, there is a visually distinct increase over this period (and incidentally over anything in the Netanyahu period as well which roughly appears to resemble the first three months of Barak's). This would appear to suggest that in terms of action taken, the detectable differentiation between Barak and Netanyahu's representation occurred around the time of the pullout announcement.

Cooperation and critical events during the time period of Hypothesis A



ISR->SYR Verbal Cooperation to Case Study Representation A

		Re-rep A	ISR-SYR Verbal Cooperation
Re-rep A	Pearson Correlation	1	.418(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.047
	N	23	23
ISR-SYR Verbal Cooperation	Pearson Correlation	.418(*)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.047	.
	N	23	23

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

There is a statistically significant correlation between the verbal cooperation on the part of Israel from shortly before Barak's administration took over to after the decision to pullout became public. This supports a portion of Hypothesis A. It should be noted that the correlation was taken from February 1999, due to the lack of data. Though Benjamin Netanyahu was in

office for the first few data points, the assumption is that strategy was not shifted instantly after Barak took office, which makes that data consistent with the initial problem representation. A survey of the data from the Netanyahu administration supports this since verbal cooperation was at roughly the same range throughout.

Upon close inspection of events for the period, it appears that using the available data for “tit-for-tat” with this hypothesis is inappropriate, since too many of the events were isolated external factors namely violence surrounding the air strikes in early 2000, and therefore unlikely to relate to problem representation. While Israel may appear to be engaged in “tit-for-tat” behavior, this course of action was instigated by terrorist organizations which are a third party to this analysis and therefore cloud any attempt to describe problem representation vis-à-vis Syria.

The increase of verbal cooperation events however, supports the hypothesis in showing that Israel did in fact change its behavior, greatly enhancing its positive verbal gestures

Test of Re-representation A and “Olive Branch” instances

Count

		Israeli Olive Branch		Total
		0	1	
Re-rep A	0	4	0	4
	1	11	3	14
Total		15	3	18

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.029(b)	1	.310	1.000	.446
Continuity Correction(a)	.064	1	.800		
Likelihood Ratio	1.672	1	.196		
Fisher's Exact Test					
Linear-by-Linear Association	.971	1	.324		
N of Valid Cases	18				

a Computed only for a 2x2 table

b 3 cells (75.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .67.

As for “olive branch” behavior, a Chi-square test failed to find a significant correlation. However, the only instances of this pattern observed occurred in the second representation. While this is somewhat encouraging, it does not provide conclusive evidence supporting Hypothesis A on its own grounds.

Hypothesis B

Hypothesis B states that if the Labor Party, following the withdrawal from Lebanon, changed its problem representation again to be pessimistic about cooperative initiatives, then it will be found to have lead to an observable shift from a high cooperation, “olive branch” strategy to “tit-for-tat” and unilateral uncooperative strategy.

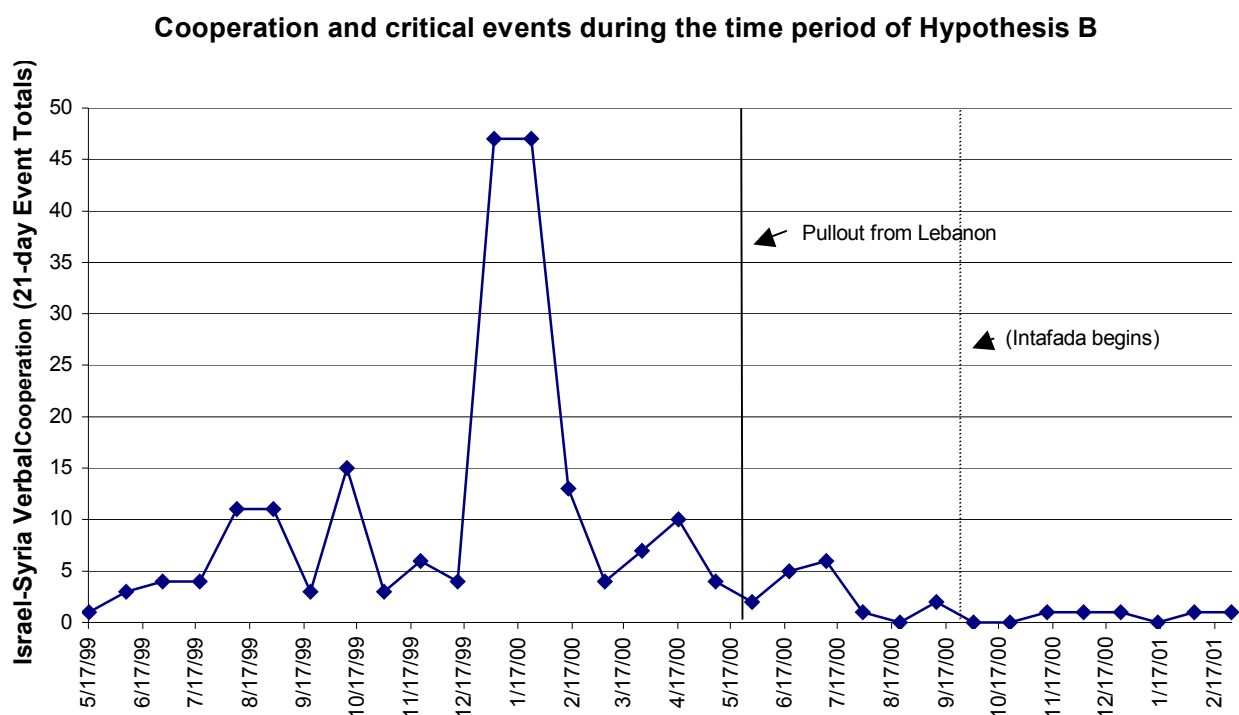
The initial representation for this hypothesis is the ‘new’ one derived in Hypothesis A and described in Appendix A, Column 2. Following the pullout from Lebanon, feedback the Barak administration received did not meet their expectations. There was virtually no gain realized on the part of Syria’s response or otherwise

Billings and Hermann suggest that shifts representations take a “U” shaped curve: they are most likely to occur rather quickly or after a prolonged period, with the likelihood decreasing in between.⁴⁵ While a new representation may be subject to second-guessing, once a representation is not dismissed immediately, it is then likely to gain strength and persist for a long period. While the Hypothesis A representation occurred after a long period of reconsiderations, the Hypothesis B re-representation was of the rapid kind. Almost immediately after the withdrawal, Hezbollah claimed victory, and they reorganized themselves, consolidating control in southern Lebanon. Palestinian groups took case as an “example” of how violence can bring about a desired outcome and the Al-Aqsa Intafada four months later dashed any hopes of

⁴⁵ Billings and Hermann, 75

the pullout bringing about reduced violence. More critically however, Syria did not reciprocate the move (until 2005) despite pressure from many different external parties to do so. In effect, Israel lost everything it had to lose, and gained nothing it had wished to gain.

If this is the case, I expect that there would be a return to the lower levels of cooperation present before the Barak administration made its initial re-representation. The instances of “olive-branch” behavior cease or greatly diminish. While Israel may perhaps ‘feel burned’ by their recent mistake and thus proceed more cautiously to respond cooperatively, “tit-for-tat” behavior inclusive of cooperative reciprocity should be found, especially since the failure of Israel’s policy seen as an internal blunder, and not the result of Syria itself doing something negative independently.



While re-occupying the territory was not pursued, the realization that an internal mistake had been made came rapidly translated into a return to “tit-for-tat” strategy, as demonstrated by the air strikes of October 2000 through the end of Barak’s term.

ISR->SYR Verbal Cooperation to Case Study Representation B

		Re-rep B	ISR->SYR Verbal Cooperation
Re-Rep B	Pearson Correlation	1	-.499(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.007
	N	28	28
ISR->SYR Verbal Cooperation	Pearson Correlation	-.499(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	.
	N	28	28

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There is a significant correlation between the change in verbal cooperation and the time of period of the new representation. This supports Hypothesis B.

Test of Re-representation B and “Tit-for-Tat”

Count

		Israel Tit-for-Tat		Total
		0	1	
Re-rep B	0	10	5	15
	1	9	1	10
Total		19	6	25

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.791(b)	1	.181		
Continuity Correction(a)	.740	1	.390		
Likelihood Ratio	1.957	1	.162		
Fisher's Exact Test				.345	.198
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.719	1	.190		
N of Valid Cases	25				

a Computed only for a 2x2 table

b 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.40.

Test of Re-representation B and “Olive Branch” instances

Count

		Israeli Olive Branch		Total
		0	1	
Re-rep B	0	13	2	15
	1	9	1	10
Total		22	3	25

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.063(b)	1	.802		
Continuity Correction(a)	.000	1	1.000		
Likelihood Ratio	.064	1	.800		
Fisher's Exact Test				1.000	.654
Linear-by-Linear Association	.061	1	.806		
N of Valid Cases	25				

a Computed only for a 2x2 table

b 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.20.

There are fewer “tit-for-tat” instances after the re-representation, yet the difference is not significant. Therefore the instances of “tit-for-tat” do not support Hypothesis B. As with Hypothesis A, there is not a statistically significant correlation between either the “olive branch” or “tit-for-tat” patterns that would support Hypothesis B.

Hypothesis C

Hypothesis C states that if Syria, following the unilateral withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon, changed its problem representation, then it will be found to have shifted from a cooperative and “tit-for-tat” strategy to unilateral uncooperative strategy.

Before the Israeli pullout from Lebanon, Hafiz al-Asad was willing to engage in a cooperative warming of Syrian-Israeli relations. Heavily dependent of United States mediation,

the elder Asad had sought to regain the Golan Heights and in return was willing to make security concessions to the Israelis. After the pause in the peace talks from 1996-1999, the two sides came into disagreement over details of secret commitments Yitzhak Rabin had made, yet the basic premise of a possible agreement remained.⁴⁶ Support for Hezbollah and the ten Damascus-based militant organizations, in addition to the token guarantee of Syrian non-aggression were Asad's bargaining chips.

Thus, column 1 of Appendix 2 illustrates the pre-pullout representation from the Asad government. Asad was interested in making peace, however only if he could achieve his goal of regaining the Golan Heights and promoting Syria's security.

While Bashir Asad replaced his father just after the pullout occurred, all indications are that he retained his father's representation of the problem, despite perhaps a notably weaker practical ability to respond to any potential Israeli concessions on the Golan. Since no such offers were made however, this is irrelevant. The Israeli pullout from Lebanon, saw a direct reaction from the "Arab street" which had been reenergized by the weakening of Arab governments in general during the late 1990's.⁴⁷ As Israel found itself confronted by the upsurge in violence, Bashir maintained Syria's posture, which conveniently was the easiest course of action anyway due to his weakness relative to his father.⁴⁸

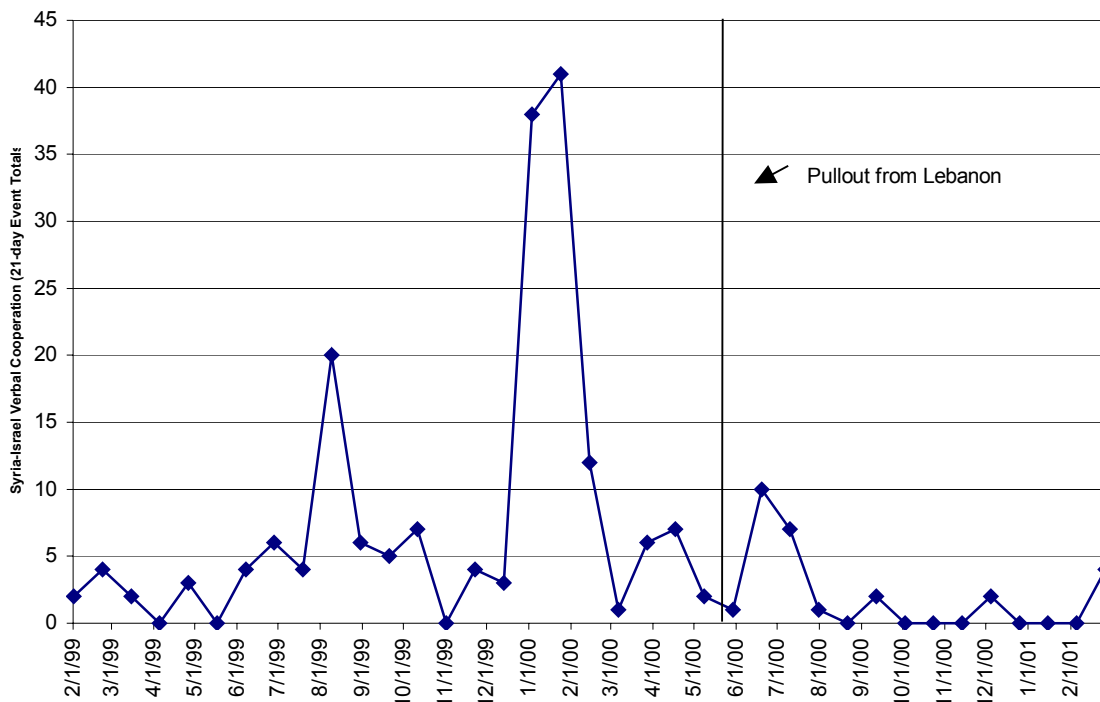
As depicted in the second column of Appendix B, Syria found itself in a far more pessimistic position after the Israeli pullout. Due to the popular response, Syria could neither take credit for the pullout, nor could now effectively initiate negotiations. For this reason I predict that cooperation and "olive-branch" instances will diminish on Syria's part.

⁴⁶ Seale, 75

⁴⁷ Eyal Zisser, "Is Anyone Afraid of Israel", *The Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2001, 5

⁴⁸ Eyal Zisser, "Does Bashir Al-Assad Rule Syria?", 1-4

Cooperation and critical events during the time period of Hypothesis C



SYR-ISR Verbal Cooperation to Case Study Representation B

		Re-rep C	SYR-ISR Verbal Cooperation
Re-rep C	Pearson Correlation	1	-.375(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.034
	N	32	32
SYR-ISR Verbal Cooperation	Pearson Correlation	-.375(*)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.034	.
	N	32	32

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

There is a significant correlation between Syrian verbal cooperation and the case study re-representation. This supports Hypothesis C.

Test of Re-representation B and “Tit-for-Tat”

Count

		Syria Tit for Tat		Total
		0	1	
Re-rep C	0	15	3	18
	1	11	3	14
Total		26	6	32

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.117(b)	1	.732		
Continuity Correction(a)	.000	1	1.000		
Likelihood Ratio	.117	1	.733		
Fisher's Exact Test				1.000	.540
Linear-by-Linear Association	.114	1	.736		
N of Valid Cases	32				

a. Computed only for a 2x2 table

b. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.63.

Test of Re-representation B and “Olive Branch”

		Syria Olive Branch		Total
		0	1	
Re-rep C	0	13	5	18
	1	11	3	14
Total		24	8	32

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.169(b)	1	.681		
Continuity Correction(a)	.000	1	1.000		
Likelihood Ratio	.171	1	.679		
Fisher's Exact Test				1.000	.504
Linear-by-Linear Association	.164	1	.685		
N of Valid Cases	32				

a. Computed only for a 2x2 table

b. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.50.

As is clear on the previous page, the <http://ep.jhax.org> tool did not provide data for “tit-for-tat” and “olive branch” that had a statistically significant correlation with the re-representation. The difference in the frequency of “tit-for-tat” and “olive branch” does not support Hypothesis C.

Conclusion

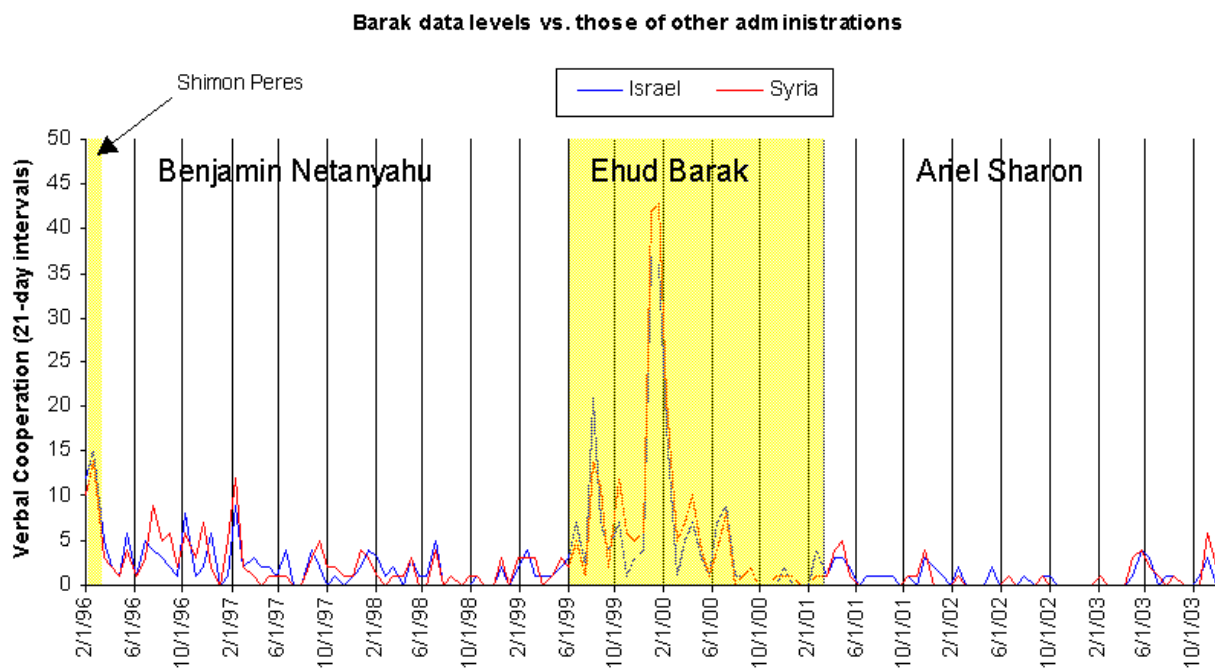
There are three primary conclusions reached. First, Billings and Hermann’s framework for problem re-representation is applicable to the cases of Israel and Syria during the time period studied. The actions of both governments fit into the framework and the actual course of events studied appears to follow the theoretical requirements which they describe. Second, the changes in problem representation clearly correlate with changes in the level of verbal cooperation displayed by the actor re-representing their problem, and thus support the notion underlying the hypotheses, that re-representation has an impact on verbal conflict and cooperation. Finally, the instances of “tit-for-tat” and “olive branch” patterns do not show a correlation with the cases of re-representation, and thus changes in these indicators do not support any of the specific hypotheses, as stated.

While the first two findings are very encouraging, I do not consider the third to mean that this method of locating changes in behavior is invalid. The attempt to utilize patterns of cooperation and conflict, beyond simply comparing changes in the level of occurrence of these indicators, was unsuccessful. However, the method used was inherently problematic. Hudson, Schrod, and Whitmer discuss calibration issues with the tool which was used and how patterns are “relative” rather than absolute.⁴⁹ For example, using the 21-day scale, cooperation suggesting an “olive branch” instance would be “relative” to an instance of conflict on the part of

⁴⁹ Hudson, Schrod, Whitmer, 38-39

the other actor in the previous 21-day value. Hudson et al. note calibration is necessary for such patterns to be meaningful. As such, the lack of correlation found with this method is not reliable enough to decisively dismiss the portion of the hypotheses which dealt with these patterns of action.

With the scale utilized, there were both “olive branch” and “tit-for-tat” patterns detected, and to some extent they did coincide with what would be expected. However, they did not do so in a manner which would be statistically significant. For this reason, the lack of correlation with this particular data should not be interpreted as a cause to reject the spirit of the hypothesis. Rather, it displays the difficulty in attempting to automate the process of finding causal relationships in conflict and cooperation.



Comparing the data from the administration of Ehud Barak with those of his predecessor and successor further supports the likelihood that the tools for measurement created the problem. The frequency of events in the Barak administration was actually far more dynamic and the average number of events was significantly higher than at other periods. It was in fact it appears

that the ‘best case’ scenario within the available data in which to hope to find “olive branch” or “tit-for-tat” patterns was during the Barak administration. The administrations before and after, have very low data levels, typically 5 or lower per 21-day period. Instances of the patterns are therefore even more rare, and over certain significant blocks of time, they are in fact non-existent.

Correlation between Syrian and Israeli Verbal Cooperation levels

		SYR-ISR Verbal Cooperation	ISR-SYR Verbal Cooperation
SYR-ISR Verbal Cooperation	Pearson Correlation	1	.959(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	32	28
ISR-SYR Verbal Cooperation	Pearson Correlation	.959(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	28	28

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

However, there is also a notable correlation between Syrian behavior and Israeli behavior during the time period studied. While this is not “tit-for-tat” in the exact sense, it does show that there is a close linkage at a general level. It suggests that perhaps a “tit-for-tat” style relationship is present, but not distinct enough in the data available to show up as statistically significant with a certain problem representation.

Further studies might involve using different sources of data, with more frequent events, as well as other, more easily measurable patterns. It would also be desirable to find a quantitative way to decisively isolate the effects of problem representation from those of other variables that may influence behavior. The approach used here focused on observing the effects of a priori instances of re-representation instead of firmly isolating them throughout the timeline. It may not be possible to locate them a posteriori without creating a vastly more complex

model scheme of interpreting data. With a more detailed and precise data set—perhaps practically requiring the observation different set of actors—it may be possible to more rigorously scrutinize, quantitatively and empirically, the effects of the psychological process that Billings and Hermann describe.

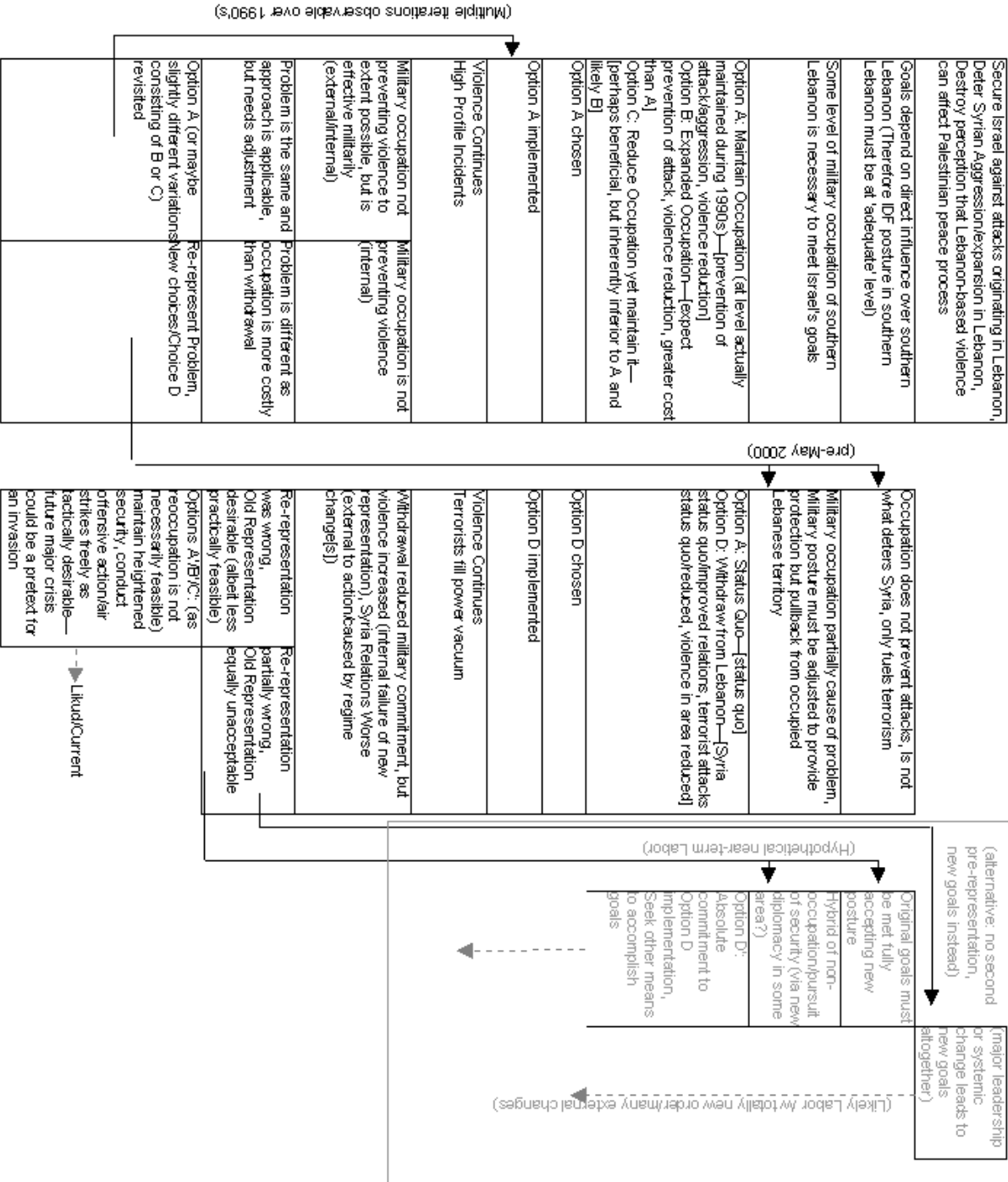
References

- Agence France Presse – English, International News database: January 1996-June 2004
available: <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com>> accessed: December, 14 2004 and January 11, 2005
- Astornino-Courtois, Alison and Brittani Trusty, *Degrees of Difficulty: The effect of Israeli Policy Shifts on Syrian Peace Decisions* Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol. 44 No. 3, June 2000: 359-377
- Axelrod, Robert *The Evolution of Cooperation* New York: Basic Books, 1984
- Billings, Robert and Charles Hermann. “Problem Identification in Sequential Policy Decision Making: The Re-representation of Problems” in Sylvan, D.A. and J.F. Voss (eds.). *Problems in Foreign Policy Decision Making* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Cobban, Helena. *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks: 1991-96 and Beyond*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1999.
- Ellis, Kail C. *Lebanon’s Second Republic: Prospects for the Twenty-first Century* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002
- George, Alan *Syria: Neither Bread nor Freedom* London and New York: Zed Books, 2003
- Goldstein, Joshua and John R. Freeman.. *Three-Way Street: Strategy Reciprocity in World Politics* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Hudson, Valerie M., Phillip A. Schrod, and Ray D. Whitmer, “A New Kind of Social Science: The Path Beyond Current (IR) Methodologies May Lie Beneath Them” ISA 2004, Montreal
- Kjorlien, Michele L. “Peace Monitor: 16 August-15 November 1999” *Journal of Palestinian Studies*. Vol. 29, No. 2, Winter 2000: 118-134.
- Kjorlien, Michele L. “Peace Monitor: 16 November-15 February 2000” *Journal of Palestinian Studies*. Vol. 29, No. 3, Spring 2000: 114-129.

- Kjorlien, Michele L. "Peace Monitor: 16 February-15 May 2000" *Journal of Palestinian Studies*. Vol. 29, No. 4, Autumn 2000: 121-137.
- Kjorlien, Michele L. "Peace Monitor: 16 May-15 August 2000" *Journal of Palestinian Studies*. Vol. 30, No. 1, Autumn 2000: 116-135.
- Kjorlien, Michele L. "Peace Monitor: 16 August-15 November 2000" *Journal of Palestinian Studies*. Vol. 30, No. 2, Winter 2001: 126-146.
- Ma'oz, Moshe. *Asad: The Sphinx of Damascus*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1988.
- Norton, Augustus Richard Norton. "Hizbullah and the Israeli Withdrawal from Southern Lebanon" *Journal of Palestinian Studies*. Vol. 30, No. 1, Autumn 2000: 22-35
- Picard, Elizabeth. *Lebanon: A Shattered Country* New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 2002.
- Quilliam, Neil. *Syria and the New World Order* Reading: Ithaca Press 1999.
- Rabinovich, Itamar, *The Brink of Peace: The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Sela, Avraham and P. R. Kumaraswamy. "The Perils of Israeli-Syrian Diplomatic Stalemate", *Security Dialogue* Vol. 32 No. 1, March 2001: 11-25
- Seale, Patrick. "The Syria-Israel Negotiations: Who is Telling the Truth?" *Journal of Palestinian Studies*. Vol. 29, No. 2, Winter 2000: 65-77
- Sebag, Ronen. "Lebanon: The Intafada's False Premise," *The Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2002.
- Shalev, Aryeh. *Israel and Syria: Peace and Security on the Golan* Jerusalem, Israel: Published for the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies by the Jerusalem Post; Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994.
- Talhami, Ghanda Hashem. *Syria and the Palestinians: A Clash of Nationalisms* Florida: University Press of Florida, 2001.
- Zisser, Eyal. *Asad's Legacy: Syria In Transition* New York: University Press, 2001.
- Zisser, Eyal. "Does Bashir Al-Assad Rule Syria?" *The Middle East Quarterly* Winter 2003.
- Zisser, Eyal. "Is Anyone Afraid of Israel" *The Middle East Quarterly* Spring 2001.
- Zisser, Eyal. "Will Bashshar al-Asad Last?" *The Middle East Quarterly*. Autumn 2000.

Appendix A: Case Study: Israeli Problem Representation

STAGE 1: GOAL DETERMINATION	
STAGE 2: PROBLEM LOCATION	
STAGE 3: PROBLEM DIAGNOSIS	
STAGE 4: OPTION DEVELOPMENT—[EXPECTATIONS]	
STAGE 5: CHOICE	
STAGE 6: IMPLEMENTATION	
STAGE 7: RECEIPT OF INFORMATION CONSEQUENCES	
STAGE 8: EVALUATION OF INFORMATION (after action)	
STAGE 9: RECONSIDERATION OF THE PROBLEM	
STAGE 10: FOLLOW-ON CHOICE	



STAGE 1: GOAL DETERMINATION	Maintain image respected among other Arab state and 'Arab Street' and pursue only real-world goals which are obtainable and support such an image. Regain Golan Heights. Prevent Israel (or other) military action against Syria
STAGE 2: PROBLEM LOCATION	Post-Cold war order makes US opinion critical. US-negotiated peace with Israel is means to regain Golan and improve security.
STAGE 3: PROBLEM DIAGNOSIS	US-negotiated peace with Israel is means to regain Golan and improve security. Support of Hezbollah and occupation of Lebanon provides leverage in negotiations. It is something which can be traded for other sides concessions
STAGE 4: OPTION DEVELOPMENT — [EXPECTATIONS]	Option A: Negotiate at Israel/US's terms meaning withdrawal from Lebanon and cut of support for military wing of Hezbollah—[loss of standing, possible coup] Option B: Negotiate, and offer Lebanon and Terror withdrawal but hold out for better terms; it for tat with Israeli moves—[regain Golan, security assured by treaty] Option C: Status Quo in Lebanon, active support for terrorism, negotiation not attempted—[seen as instigator, able to maintain only status quo benefits] Option B chosen
STAGE 5: CHOICE	Option B chosen
STAGE 6: IMPLEMENTATION	Option B →
STAGE 7: RECEIPT OF INFORMATION CONSEQUENCES	Progress is made with various negotiations, no final peace made, Lebanon status quo Israel pulls out of Lebanon unilaterally due to public support; no equiv support for Golan Influence in Lebanon decreases as opposition groups gain strength. Hezbollah views pullout as a victory they won. Intifada begins. Hafiz Al-Asad dies. Sharon government makes its own re-presentation in reaction to Intifada, etc
STAGE 8: EVALUATION OF INFORMATION (attribution)	Leadership changes in Israel stall developments (external) Events outside of Syria's control (Israel public option/4 mothers incident) caused it to lose what was previously a source of leverage (external) All events make it harder to leave status quo and attempt negotiations (external). Israelis will not budge any time soon (external). Posture with Lebanon/Hezbollah failed to be an asset as predicted. Syria feels impotent and threatened (internal). Syria's action prior to the pullout did not lead it closer to its desired outcome (internal)
STAGE 9: RECONSIDERATION OF THE PROBLEM	Problem is the same—Wait for suitable Israel administration and US pressure Problem is same-- external environment has changed Re-representation. Cooperation is useless: nothing substantial can be gained without losing far more than Syria is able to lose (or Asad is without being overthrown)
STAGE 10: FOLLOW-ON CHOICE	Option B chosen Option B Option C Same (tense situation) → Option C Option C Syria is largely alone, Israel poses a security threat. Maintaining independent identity and pursuing Arab goals is essential. Must walk fine line between this and provoking military attack. Truly peaceful outcome impossible Option B: Previous Attitude/Status Quo—starts to look like Option A) Option C: Status Quo (includes supporting Iraq)—[no benefits, any loss originates externally] Option C Option C Problem is Same Syria is forced into its situation by the actions of Israel (external)